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Baghdad schools get more classrooms

By Norris Jones
Gulf Region Central District



Students in a number of Baghdad neighborhoods are enjoying the results of construction efforts expanding their schools. Some are being renovated and in other areas brand new facilities are being built. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

BAGHDAD, Iraq – A number of schools in Baghdad are overcrowded and construction is under way to help alleviate that problem.

Saad Al Gandour, an Iraqi Project Engineer, is overseeing work at five schools in west Baghdad for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). "They had up to 50 students in some classrooms and that's just too many. The optimum number is no more than 30. So we're adding five additional classrooms,

expanding each of those 12-classroom facilities to 17."

Apart from the new construction, those Iraqi construction crews are also renovating the existing facilities including electrical and plumbing improvements, and a fresh coat of paint.

Gandour earned a degree in civil engineering from Baghdad University and has been working for USACE for nearly two years. "This is very satisfying work. Families in those neighborhoods

appreciate the investment. It also means jobs for local workers who are on those construction crews. And it's those workers who have the most to gain because in many cases, it's their children who will be attending those schools."

In addition to the building improvements, those projects also include funding for new school supplies including desks, blackboards, cabinets, notebooks, pens and pencils. "I recently visited one of those schools and had a chance to talk to the students and teachers. They were very pleased with the improvements."

Lt. Col. Glen Masset, Commander of the 9th Engineer Battalion, keeps track of all essential service projects in his area of responsibility that covers most of northwest Baghdad. He notes that not only is USACE involved in construction projects improving local education, but USAID, World Bank, and Coalition Forces are also lending a hand with their own programs. "We all understand what's at stake – Iraqi children need fundamental educational opportunities if they and this country are to succeed. It all starts in the classroom."

Besides the improvements to existing facilities, Ministry of Education has approved plans to build several new million-dollar schools in Baghdad. Gandour points out that construction is under way on a new two-story 12-classroom elementary school in the Al Bayaa beladiya. "It's a new design that will include a computer lab, audiovisual studio, multi-purpose room for assemblies, workshop, cafeteria, library, science lab, playground, as well as administrative offices for the faculty."

Gandour noted that education is very important to all Iraqis. "We want the best for our children and grandchildren. One definite sign of progress is how proficient our elementary students are becoming with their computer skills and accessing the internet – they have a definite interest in expanding their horizon and joining a global dialogue. I'm very pleased to be part of USACE's efforts in rebuilding Iraq. In Baghdad alone, over 100 schools have been renovated. These projects are having a direct positive impact on thousands of students every day."





Renovation work on the Nahrain School in west Baghdad was completed Oct. 12. That \$316,608 project included a 213-sq.-meter five-classroom addition, 70-sq.-meter new restroom facility, and new playfield. The school's existing 12 classrooms were renovated including electrical, lighting, floor tile repairs, plastering and painting. School supplies and furniture for the new addition were part of the contract. This is one of several schools throughout Baghdad getting a facelift and additional classrooms. (USACE photo)

Note: Norris Jones is a Public Affairs Specialist with the Gulf Region Division Central District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact him at 544-665-2644 or email requests to CEGRD.PAO@tac01.usace.army.mil. For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.